“Matisyahu’s Jerusalem” LESSON PLAN

by David Micley

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Students will explore what makes up their identity by constructing an “Identity Wall.” Then students will watch Matisyahu’s video “Jerusalem,” exploring the multiple messages of identity expressed in the song. Finally, students will compose a fourth verse to the song, offering their own interpretation of how Jerusalem relates to their identity.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will create their own personal identity walls.
- Students will analyze the messages of identity in Matisyahu’s song.
- Students will write their own verse to the song, offering personal interpretations of what Jerusalem means to their identity.

ACTIVITY

1. Construct an identity wall.

Give every student 6 sticky notes. Tell them to take one note and write down the single most important aspect of their own identity, sticking it on the table. Then tell the students to take two more notes and write down the next two most important aspects of their own identity, sticking them next to the other note on the table. Finally, tell students to take the remaining three sticky notes and write down the next most important aspects of their identity, sticking them next to the other notes. Explain to students that they just built an “Identity Wall,” a structure that shows what they think are their defining characteristics.

2. Watch the video and study the lyrics.

Play Matisyahu’s “Jerusalem” video http://mediamidrash.behrmanhouse.com/watch.php?VID_ID=H8ULIw0Zgaw. Ask students what they think Matisyahu would write on his first sticky note, representing the core aspect of his identity. Wait until someone says “Jerusalem.”

Study the following Jewish text, which is the basis for the song’s chorus:

Psalms 137:5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.	תהלים קלז:ה ו אִם אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ יְרוּשָׁלִָם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי: תִּדְבַּק לְשׁוֹנִי לְחִכִּי אִם לֹ֥א אֶזְכְּרֵכִי אִם לֹ֥א אַעֲלֶה אֶת יְרוּשָׁלִַם עַל רֹ֥אשׁ שִׂמְחָתִי:

How can Jerusalem be as important to someone as their own right hand?

What does it say about Matisyahu’s identity that Jerusalem is as intrinsic to him as his right hand?

Have students listen to the song again, this time paying closer attention to the words, images, themes, and ideas that Matisyahu connects to Jerusalem. See http://www.mp3lyrics.org/m/matisyahu/jerusalem/ for song lyrics.

3. Compose an additional verse.

Divide students into groups of four. Have them write their own verse to the song, encouraging them to write about what Jerusalem means to them. Allow students to perform their verses for the class with the song music in the background.

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